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ABSTRACT

Earlier research on girls in a single-sex private school found that girls at adolescence tend to lose a sense of self and undergo a developmental crisis that inhibits their self-expression. This report focuses on 26 girls in grades 8 and 9 from poor and working class backgrounds. The unique concerns of these girls from different races and cultures were determined by listening to them, by using the voices of the girls themselves to express what helps them as they struggle with issues of belonging to a minority group and becoming women. These girls, who were identified as at risk of dropping out and early parenthood, demonstrated the same vitality and creativity shown by the privileged girls in the earlier study. They also experienced the tension between being silent and speaking out, and the same tension was recognized by the researchers, themselves a culturally diverse group of women. This study highlights opportunities for preventing girls from all backgrounds from silencing themselves. What helps girls most is being listened to by women. The crises of adolescence are best managed with the help of attentive listeners. (Contains 353 references.) (SLD)

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